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STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, SCA/PPD, S/CRS, S/CT,
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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AMIDST MUSA QALA FIGHTING, AFGHANS
BLAME BRITISH TROOPS FOR ITS TAKEOVER BY TALIBAN

1) SUMMARY: As Afghan and Coalition forces attempt to recapture the Musa Qala District of Helmand Province from the Taliban, Afghan editorialists blame British forces there for allowing it to fall to the Taliban in the first place. A deal struck between British forces and local tribal elders in February collapsed soon after, and the Taliban overran the district. Commentators are optimistic about the operation's success. But they bemoan the opportunity the Taliban has had there to rearm, train, and grow poppy, and warn that only the continued, augmented presence of Afghan security forces will keep the Taliban from retaking the district. END SUMMARY.

2) An unsigned editorial in independent daily Arman-e-Millie entitled "Why Musa Qala Turned into a Terrorist Stronghold," stated that, "The military operation by Afghan, U.S., and British forces to recapture Musa Qala in Helmand Province is in progress and it seems as if they might succeed in clearing the town of Taliban and other terrorists, but this is not the subject to be discussed. Rather, the subject is how the Taliban were able to capture Musa Qala and turn it into a terrorist stronghold in the first place almost a year ago.

The so-called 'political accord' between the British forces and the tribal elders was broken by the Taliban insurgents and they were able to carry heavy artillery and modern weapons from the other side of the border to stand firm and fight the Afghans and Coalition Forces. Right after this occurrence, some intelligence agencies started shouting that the Taliban are a reality, military operations against them are not the best solution, and we should hold talks with them.

But after ten months, they found out that the Taliban are not only threatening Afghanistan, but the region and the world. They must be defeated by military operations. This unacceptable process shows that the international forces have been mistaken in their fight against terrorism, and they have only looked after their own interests, which is very hard for the Afghans' to understand. If the foreign forces are really committed to defeating the terrorists in Afghanistan and the region, then they should clear every other region under the Taliban's control, in addition to Musa Qala, and should seek strategies to prevent their future recapture by the Taliban by any means."

3) An unsigned editorial in independent daily Weesa entitled, "The Musa Qala Accord Was Not a Good Game to Have Played," stated that, "The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and international forces are gathered in Musa Qala to put pressure on the Taliban and force them to leave the region. Musa Qala fell to the Taliban after a simple accord on a piece of paper was signed by British troops with the tribal elders. The results show that the Musa Qala accord was a gamble, and the ANSF and NATO forces have suffered badly from its consequences.

The fall of Musa Qala to the Taliban was a success for the Taliban, and a big morale booster for them as well. Now, if the government succeeds in recapturing the district, then it will be a morale booster for the government after months of psychological pressure by the Taliban and their insurgent activities."

4) An unsigned editorial in independent daily Rahenejat "The Need for a Major Government Presence in Troubled Areas," stated that, "Efforts to recapture the troubled district of Musa Qala are being exerted after almost a year of the Taliban's presence there. The Taliban turned Musa Qala into a safe haven for poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. Meanwhile, there were no plans to recapture the district by the ANSF or the allies to be found. The collapse of Musa Qala paved the way for the foreign terrorists to create obstacles for the Government of Afghanistan and its allies. There have been several attempts to reclaim the district by negotiating with tribal elders rather than by military operations, but these have proven insignificant.

During this period the people in Musa Qala have suffered a great deal. Living under the rule of the terrorists, there have been times when they were used as human shields in fighting the ANSF and Coalition forces. The Government of Afghanistan and its allies

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should have attempted to recapture the district long ago, and should have prevented the Taliban insurgents from training and equipping their evil forces in the area.

The Government and the Coalition forces' shortfall in training the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police is felt all the time, and this has been a major factor in the collapse of many districts and regions into the hands of the Taliban. Therefore, the government should also consider guarding the recaptured regions an important issue as well."

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